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Imagining Englishness through Contested English Landscapes

Abstract

This article adds to current debates on the nature of English identity through examining some of the ‘incommensurate qualities that ... link complexly’ (Stewart, 2007: 30) to create a certain feel of a place. Based on the premise that landscape and the story of the landscape, its history, are key elements of a national identity, the article explores the shaping of an imagined community of England through memory, forgetting and ‘official’ stories by using the examples of three specific but mundane places, in north west England. One is urban ex-industrial, one a formerly industrial but rural site and one rural agricultural. These stories are unravelled to show how the landscapes are integrated ‘taskscape’ where both national and local identities are performed. Class and race are hidden behind essentialised notions of Englishness. These exemplify a particular moral vision of English landscapes as natural and timeless countryside that serves to side-line urban and working landscapes and their populations. The paper proposes treating a ‘taskscape’ as a gift to future generations thus enabling all those who are a part of the present taskscape to belong.

Keywords: Englishness; landscape; taskscape; national identity; nostalgia; imagined community; gift

Introduction

Many years ago I took a summer job in a pub in a village in Hampshire. I had recently returned from six months on a kibbutz in Israel and the rolling green fields of Hampshire in the late spring gave me a heightened sense of being back in England. Which seems a little odd as I grew up in the industrial North West so slag heaps and Victorian red brick buildings should have been a more familiar milieu to me. But I knew what England was meant to look like and the chocolate box villages and rolling green pastures fitted the bill perfectly. In seeing England in this particular way I was buying into the ‘green and pleasant land’ notion of English national identityⁱ. But remembering this, I am also reminded that there is no such thing as a single English landscape. England can be equally well symbolised by the mountains and lakes of the Lake District or the white cliffs of Dover; by the landmarks of London or the colourful beach huts of any south coast seaside town, divided, as Matless (2001: 17-18) points out, along both a north/south and east/west divide. What unifies most of these idealised visions of England is a ‘static and essentialised’ (Garner, 2012: 447) cultural landscape which is implicitly raced, classed and gendered, potentially leading to an exclusionary notion of Englishness. We should, perhaps, instead be looking for visions of a multiplicity of overlapping ‘Englands’ and commensurate notions of Englishness. Kingsnorth (2015) claims ‘[a] nation, in other words, is about belonging – to a specific place that is not quite like another place, and to a collective of people you share things with’. This is a statement most would probably agree with. If, as Kingsnorth also suggests ‘[a] nation is a story that a people chooses to tell about itself’ then it can be argued that the veracity and completeness of that story is important for all the people of the nation to feel a sense of belonging. Belonging to a nation is, as are all forms of belonging, part of a web of social and material relationships stretched across past, present and future (Author, 2014). Therefore what I am setting out to do in this article is to explore how some of the stories of the past

that we tell ourselves as a nation comprise partial and incomplete relationships and thus serve to exclude those written out of the narrative. This will be done through the stories of some of the smaller places and spaces of England, with their own distinctive, local and often overlooked, histories. Rather than retreading the well worn paths of the Lake District or the Peak District these smaller, less well-known places can illustrate the ubiquity of what Relph (1976: 58) calls 'mass identities' of places.

There is, as Malpas (2009) points out, a 'mutuality' between people and landscape. Malpas goes on to say 'while we may affect the places in which we live and so may take responsibility for them, those places also affect us in profound and inescapable ways' (p. 22). In order to imagine a national community (Anderson, 2006) there needs to be a common understanding of national symbols depicted in everyday life such as flags, monuments and landscapes (Billig, 1995; Daniels, 1993; Edensor, 2002). Landscapes are an integral part of everyday life: they are lived and worked, or 'taskscape' as Ingold (2000) defines a combination of place, activity and people over time. The places examined here are all palimpsests, layering elements of their present over the past, but all have had some of these layers overlooked or forgotten. Change over time may evoke elements of nostalgia, a powerful and moralistic strand of a national belonging created as an imagined community, as well as claims to authenticity through connections to an originary 'natural'ⁱⁱ landscape. It is this nostalgic England Paul Kingsnorth refers to in his writings (2006, 2015). Many nostalgic images (such as the rolling green fields I began this place with) are superficial public identities created through mass media for public consumption (Relph, 1976: 61). Any sense of belonging created through such images will, therefore, also be superficial and nostalgic. An alternative and potentially deeper sense of belonging to a nation can be drawn out by figuring places as Maussian gifts used by the present generation and then passed on in the future (Author, 2014).

Through looking at three different and little known English landscapes, one in the industrialised town of Wigan and two in the more rural county of Cheshire, I explore how the materialisation of national identity occurs through commonly evoked moralistic evocations of the landscape. The mediated sites I have chosen to illustrate an idea of English landscapes and their relation to an English identity are local and particular with specific histories (cf. Jones & Cloke, 2008; Hill, 2013; Lorimer, 2014; Trimm, 2012; Wylie, 2012). Their histories bleed into wider histories of England and forms of Englishness and therefore can be illustrative. I am focusing on Englishness as this is a particularly problematic identity, subsumed as it often is into Britishness (Kumar, 2003). As Mann (2011) found, an 'English' place can be understood through material elements of the place or through the people who live there. These are, in essence, inseparable: people make places (Lowenthal, 1991). And just as the types of landscape that are thought of as English vary enormously so do the identities of the people who inhabit those landscapes and work within them to produce a national 'taskscape' (Ingold, 2000). England is not isolated and its landscapes include aspects of other countries both through architecture (e.g. Wright, 2009) and how people identify with them (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Although the local places I use to illustrate the arguments here are small, England itself is not symbolically 'little', but globally connected even through these seemingly small places. The connections to the wider world are not a result of recent globalisation but depict millennia of history through their 'taskscape', containing inalienable traces of previous inhabitants (Jones, 2010).

The next section lays out the rationale for basing national identity on landscape, followed by a brief outline of the place of people in creating landscapes, referring specifically to Ingold's (2000) 'taskscape'. I then move on to look at descriptions of the specific places chosen to illustrate the arguments being made through leaflets designed to encourage visitors and fieldnotes from my experience of walking in each place. This paper is therefore a combination of discourse analysis and ethnography. The selection of different places, which are relatively close in travel terms, are from distinct types of areas: one is urban working class; one is a more rural, middle class but still well populated area; and the third rural with a complex mix of class affiliations (Bell, 1994). Each is marketed as a 'natural' landscape and each has its own distinctive history as a taskscape. Finally the article draws out the way these stories present particular socially structured images of the places, which overlook the activity of the people who inhabited them previously, and how an alternative conceptualisation of a taskscape as a gift might broaden out understandings of what 'English' means.

National identity as imagined community

Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities* describes the development of nation states (the 'communities' of the title) as based on the development of media, initially through the printing press. Others have since taken on board the idea of communities stretching beyond physical reach, for example Pahl (2005) writing of 'communities in the mind'. The concept of an 'imagined community' is based on the use of symbols to replace, to some extent, face-to-face relations (Anderson, 2006: 26). In this way, the understanding that other, unknown people are acting in similar ways to oneself, at a similar time, creates a 'nation': we read the same newspapers and books, access the same websites and inhabit similar landscapes. Within every nation there are differences, and this also becomes a part of the national story: in England, for example, northerners are seen as stereotypically working class (Shields, 1991, p. 212), although there is no singular 'northern' identity either of people or landscape. A unified national identity may be premised on an agreement to 'forget' certain things, such as civil wars (Renan, 1990), colonialism (Tyler, 2012) and class hierarchies (Bell, 1994). England's intimate relations with a large part of the world through the legacy of the British Empire tends to be particularly overlooked in stories of national identity (Tolia-Kelly, 2006), with Englishness often taken as an ethnic identity in contrast to the recent reworking of Scottishness as a civic identity (Kenny, 2015; Mann, 2011; McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015).

The 'external' view, or 'public identity' (Relph, 1976: 58) of a place may be fixed within a socially constructed frame but internally the 'landscape' is an 'inherently unstable' 'spatialisation' (Shields, 1991: 65). Tyler (2012) shows how hidden histories of colonialism can be used to unite a community around a common objective but also create 'inside' and 'outside' understandings of specific places which serve to exclude, in this case British Asians. There is also a less obviously constructed discourse around place and identity that people use when talking about place and belonging. This takes the materiality of a place as 'natural', such as the example I gave at the beginning of this article. Such a nostalgic version of an imagined and essentialised Englishness papers over class differences, in, perhaps a very 'English' way. For example, it is similar to the way those in the village of 'Childerley' (Bell, 1994) speak of unified 'country people' rather than expressing dissatisfaction at the inequalities between working and middle class residents. Englishness is thus homogenised as a pseudo middle class identity which is also implicitly white (Garner, 2012; Mann, 2011).

Whilst places, such as England, may be seen as unchanging, in fact landscapes

are contested, worked and re-worked by people according to particular individual, social and political circumstances. As such they are always in process, rather than static, being and becoming... landscapes are structures of feeling, palimpsests of past and present, outcomes of social practice...

(Tilley 2006: 7 - 8).

The identity of a nation is similarly unstable and can, Bhabha (1990: 300) argues, only remain unified by displacing a modern, diverse place into an 'archaic and mythical' space. This kind of appeal to an authentic historical identity through a nostalgic vision of the past is difficult to challenge. The 'archaic and mythical' space of England is implicitly the nostalgic England writers such as Paul Kingsnorth (2008) look 'back' to. It is mythical because it never existed and, as with all myths, has to dissociate itself from specifics. The sentiment chimes with Tönnies' (2001) '*Gemeinschaft*' – a close rural community. A raft of community studies in the UK (Bell and Newby, 1971) have shown this to be an unrealistic notion: actual communities are not unified although most coexist successfully across, particularly in these studies, class backgrounds (Frankenberg, 1966). By drawing on local landscapes with specifically local histories, rather than the universalised 'idea' of a Cotswold village, the Lake District or an English seaside town, this paper will show how stories of places can create unrealistic ideas of an almost ahistorical, static landscape of England. Alternatively an 'authentic' history which chimes with local people's stories, rather than one that harks back nostalgically to a romantic 'natural' past, can promote an inclusive version of the place or nation (Jones, 2010).

An understanding of the historical trajectories of places is important in order to position the place, and its people, in the present (Gray, 1999: 455). The told history of a place, its biography, is, as with all histories, necessarily teleological: its purpose is to explain how the place came to be as it is now, today, in the present moment (Anderson, 2006). The past is thus brought to bear on the present and remains affective through an inalienable presence in material things whose temporality exceeds human life times (Jones, 2010). The inalienable traces are not themselves past but always in the present. The performance of everyday life is shaped by these previous inhabitants and their practices, whether or not they are known about. This is the essence of Mauss' concept of the gift (Fowler, 2004).

'Taskscape' is used by Ingold (2000) to describe the mutual, generally routine and often unnoticed, practices of interaction between people and environment over multiple human life times. A taskscape acknowledges both the activities of humans in altering landscapes and the inevitability not only of change over time, but change that is directed by previous changes. As Ingold puts it 'the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves' (1993: 152). The places of England, created in their present form partially through the activities of people, are therefore constitutive of an English national identity. Drawing on this understanding the rest of the paper will look at how public or 'mass' (Relph, 1976: 58) identities of places overlook the people who

contributed to their, and the nation's, creation and present an alternative way of seeing places as gifts from past to future generations.

The next section will examine the material taskscape of three specific places and the discourses surrounding them through information provided by local councils and the trusts who help to run the sites, via leaflets and signboards as well as my fieldnotes from multiple visits to the sites. The places explored here are Wigan Flashes, a former industrial site in Wigan, north-west England with the Leeds Liverpool canal running through it; part of the 'Saltscape' area in the county of Cheshire also in north west England, comprising flashes, former salt works and the Trent and Mersey canal, and the Sandstone Trail area of Bickerton also in Cheshire.

Landscape as National Identity

Visiting the Flashes at Poolstock, in Wigan, Lancashire on a Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust walk a ranger from the Lancashire Wildlife Trust showed the group around. The Flashes are described as a 'haven for wildlife' (Lancashire Wildlife Trust, n.d.) and due to specific features of the formerly industrial site, such as changing some of the underlying ground from acidic to alkaline, have developed habitats that attract rare creatures including the bittern, a wading bird. A visitor information leaflet produced by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust tells the story of a place that has 'overcome' its industrial heritage in order to become a pleasant place for leisure:

The Flashes (or lakes) are a legacy of the town's industrial past and were formed as a result of mining subsidence. Some of the flashes were partially filled with colliery waste and ash from the nearby Westwood Power Station. Ince Moss Colliery closed in 1962 and Westwood Power Station was demolished as recently as 1989. Natural colonisation and large-scale reclamation works have helped *heal the industrial scars*, turning the area into the amenity it is today.

(Lancashire Wildlife Trust), my emphasis

Coal mining caused the Flashes to develop as well as bringing people to the area, the power station being built as a result of this. This taskscape has undergone a radical shift from people working together in an industrial landscape to people sharing leisure time in another landscape. This in turn was created through the activities undertaken in the earlier form of this taskscape – the mining. This site is, as are all places, a palimpsest. There are not only layers of history but also a building of one layer upon another, the new stratum growing out of the previous one and therefore now being a 'natural' environment (that is, not built on) without the need to make claims further back to any previous 'untouched' state. Inalienable traces of the collieries and power station in the composition of the soil have given rise to particular wildlife habitats; the place has a liveliness of its own that helps to shape the changes in this taskscape (Cloke & Jones, 2001: 660). Much of this legacy, in terms of the visibility within the landscape, has been covered over or removed.

On another visit to the Flashes in the summer of 2017 an information post had its original picture of a bird or plant painted over and replaced by a hand painted picture of a pit head and winding wheel. The last mine in the area closed in 1993 and most remaining buildings removed so a pit head is rarer than a bittern nowadays. Winding wheels are used as 'artworks' in a number of places, with one situated outside Wigan College. The nostalgia for a mining past shown in the sign, whilst understandable, also potentially assumes that a particular 'version' of the past was preferable to the present.

Although the area is reminiscent of other English landscapes with peaceful lakes, areas of open heath and wildflower meadows, this is not a landscape in the tradition of rolling green fields or rugged Yorkshire moors. As flashes naturally occur in dips the landscape is largely hidden from view until one is in it. Approaching from the patch of waste ground that is the carpark recommended on the Wigan Borough website (Wigan Council, n.d.) I followed an unassuming track that led over recent earthworks alongside the largest of the flashes, Pearson's Flash, where a solitary paddleboarder shared the water with a variety of wildfowl. The canal footpath between the flash and the Leeds Liverpool canal is broad and paved as are other main paths in the reserve making it a very accessible place. Although the canal brings in tourists the people I encountered – dog walkers, runners, cyclists – tended to be locals, who have greater potential for closely identifying with the place and its history. That history is mixed however and whilst the Lancashire Wildlife Trust and others celebrate the latest incarnation of this piece of land as a site of nature and leisure, others clearly lament the loss of industry and the associated jobs.

There is a distinctly moral tone to the 'healing' of 'industrial scars' in the above extract. During the early part of the Industrial Revolution the foundries and mills were depicted as part of a landscape of progress (Daniels, 1993), however during the nineteenth century, as conditions for labourers grew worse and slums proliferated, a more 'natural' landscape became symbolic of England. This is the 'green and pleasant land' version of England with which I began this paper: it is an implicitly bourgeois place where labour, whether industrial or agricultural, is hidden away both in the past, as the bourgeoisie moved out of urban centres to avoid their squalor (Hall, 1992), and in the present as 'scars' are 'healed'. However, rather than creating a lacuna in the natural history of this site, its industrial past creates it as an authentic part of English history, as the notion of a 'legacy' – or gift - indicates. Wigan is not generally seen as a tourist destination but the popularity of canal holidays means that people do, at least, pass through and the bitterns which populate the flashes are an attraction for ornithologists. The subversive repainting of the signpost brings the inalienable presence of previous generations into sight. The history of the place should not need to be forgotten in order to celebrate the site as a part of a northern English heritage.

Another area of flashes caused by a different type of mining subsidence, is the 'Saltscape' area of Cheshire. This comprises an area of mid-Cheshire along the River Weaver from Frodsham to Northwich, Winsford and Middlewich. The opening up of this naturalized landscape is a more recent project than Wigan Flashes. The Lion Salt Works museum reopened in 2015 after restoration. The Saltscape Trail leaflet (Saltscape, n.d.) draws attention to the way 'salt shaped the landscape' and the way the area 'owes much of its distinctive character to the presence of salt and its exploitation over centuries'. As with

Wigan Flashes, the recognition of a taskscape is muted as people are only implicitly involved – they, presumably, did the ‘exploiting’ - and again there is a celebration of the ‘transformation of the area from industrial wasteland to wildlife haven’. A tour around the Lion Works Salt museum demonstrates the hard conditions for the workers. Brine was heated in huge lead salt pans with a fire beneath and workers had to scoop out the salt crystals as they formed, a method which originated with the Romans. They were rewarded with a pub on-site where they could spend their wages, giving their earnings back to the owners of the saltworks! Salt mining flashes are briny and therefore attract distinctive wildlife. The area was also used to store lime waste – an industrial by-product. This is now hidden as ‘Marshall’s Wood established naturally on top of the waste’ (Saltscape, n.d.) showing how quickly industrial sites can disappear and potentially be forgotten (Jones and Cloke, 2008). Overall the importance of salt for both people and the creation of this landscape, is celebrated in the leaflet as a gift from the previous generations (Saltscape, n.d.).

The industries which caused the flashes of Wigan and mid-Cheshire are interdependent. As described above, brine was heated to enable crystalized salt to form and be collected. The Romans destroyed the local forests collecting wood for burning but by the nineteenth century coal was being used. As there were no coal reserves in Cheshire this had to be brought in from surrounding coalfields in Lancashire and Stoke-on-Trent. The canals enabled coal to be brought in and the salt to be taken more easily to Liverpool where it was traded globally. Salt makes excellent ballast for ships, as well as being a commodity for trade in Africa, where the trade continued until the 1960s. This much is part of the story told at the Lion Salt Works museum (Saltworks, n.d.). The full story, however, is not made explicit in the formulaic ‘Roman – medieval – industrial - re-naturalised’ history that is used here and at sites across the UK such as Bickerton (see below) and Leicestershire (Tyler, 2012).

Ships from Liverpool to Africa would export salt; slaves would then be taken to America or British colonies; cotton would be brought back to be woven in the Lancashire cotton mills, powered by coal-fired steam engines (Kurlansky, 2003: 318-9). This history demonstrates the importance of Cheshire salt to England’s economy in the past but is not mentioned in the information on the Saltscape (Saltscape, n.d.). Along with the oppression of the working classes, long working hours for men, women and children for little pay in coal mining and salt production and the appalling conditions of the men digging the canals (many of them Irish and subjected to discrimination and abuse), the horrors of the Slave Trade are also written into the landscapes of Wigan and Cheshire (Kurlansky, 2003). An authentic understanding of how the current landscape evolved needs to include these global influences. Favourable taxation and colonialism ensured the success of Cheshire salt (Kurlansky, 2003). The result is the current landscape pockmarked with flashes, which is able to be celebrated in the present for its distinctive plants and insects. This gift, however, also contains the inalienable traces of the worst aspects of colonialism.

Both these sites show how industry, people and geology combine to create English taskscapes (Ingold, 2000), that are unique and always in process. Neither, however, is able to condense an adequate understanding of that history into the five hundred words or so available on a sign board or leaflet. A history of a nation to which all can subscribe needs to

be comprehensive and authentic rather than succumbing to a more simplistic nostalgia and a simplistic good/bad dichotomy of nature and industry.

Below is a perhaps less obviously moralistic description of the Sandstone Trail in Cheshire. The historical influences from the Iron Age hill forts, Roman roads and Beeston Castle built in the 1220s are explicitly highlighted lending a tone of authenticity to what otherwise appears to be a nostalgic description.

This is rural Cheshire at its best, quiet and sleepy at times yet steeped in history and rich in wildlife. Evidence of early settlers abounds in the hill forts and burial mounds along the ridge while the Trail crosses a Roman road and meanders through the medieval hunting forest of Mara and Mondrum, today well known as Delamere Forest. The well-wooded Peckforton Hills stand proud of the Cheshire Plain with Beeston Castle commanding panoramas of eight counties.

(Cheshire West and Chester, 2009)

This is perhaps typical of this genre of advertising as there are many similarities with Tyler's (2012) analysis of the promotion of Leicestershire: the somewhat ubiquitous reference to the Romans, the relatively sparsely populated area indicated in the 'quiet and sleepy' description, and popular references to Medieval times invoking tales of knights and honour. In contrast to the previous 'reclaimed' sites this area is depicted as permanently 'wooded' and forested, with a continuous history stretching back to Neolithic times. In fact, the area has also been home to significant industry in the past. The hills close to the Peckforton Estate were the site of copper mining from the 17th century, with rail tracks and an engine house chimney still present (Sandstone Trail, n.d.). The kind of formulaic notion of English history presented here unifies 'England' under a shared story, but the story is glib and nostalgic. It has the potential to become ahistorical through its static depiction of the countryside. This is a backward-looking history that England is mired in, rather than informed by.

The leaflet goes on to say:

The estate woodlands are primarily managed for pheasant rearing while Bickerton Hill, owned by the National Trust, is managed for nature conservation to protect and improve the heathland. South of the Larkton Hill the land is more suited to dairy farming, producing milk for the famous Cheshire cheese and some fabulous ice cream.

(Cheshire West and Chester, 2009)

The National Trust's role in conserving nature and the heathland indicates that preserving this landscape originally created in the Iron Age is seen as nationally important. This idyllic picture belies the contested identities of Bickerton Hill and the farmed plain below the sandstone ridge. In contrast to the managed woodlands of the privately owned Peckforton Estate, the lowland heath of Bickerton Hill, formerly used as common grazing but now owned by the National Trust, has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The land was used for grazing until the end of the Second World War keeping saplings at bay, and where birches did manage to grow the twigs would be used to make besoms, a kind of broom. Since the grazing and the making of besoms stopped, trees have taken over the landscape creating a wooded hill rather than heathland. From the early 1990s the National Trust have periodically cut down many of the birches to try to restore the heathland. A central issue of restoring heathland is that heath is a man-made landscape, not a 'natural' one. Visiting the site in the late spring after trees have been cut down I can see birch seedlings far outnumbering the desired growth of bilberries and heather. Only through use, through the everyday, working class activities of collecting the saplings for besoms and the grazing of animals, does the heath maintain its status as a particular taskscape, and its environment as a habitat for rare species. Its story is written into the landscape from the earthworks of the Iron Age Maiden Castle to the present.

The plains below Larkton Hill are also a working landscape or taskscape rather than a rural idyll. Current use of the land is described in the pheasant rearing and dairy farming. The pheasants are, of course, not only reared in the estate but some are shot here too, as this is a money-making business, one aspect of this working landscape that is not celebrated in this description. The continuing use of the land for producing food does not mention the difficulties small scale family farms have in making a living from cows. The supermarkets' control over milk prices make it difficult to make a profit and many farms have closed in recent years.

1944, my granddad bought the farm, so I'm the third generation, probably the last unless my daughters want to have a go at it but in today's climate farms seem to be a dying breed so the chances are they wouldn't take it on, I don't think, but you never know, we'll find out as time goes on.

(Dairy farmer, 2007)

The idea of green fields and black and white cows is indicative of a 'typically English' landscape but it is a working landscape, produced through using the land, as much as any industrial landscape is. It is also modern: dairy farming on this scale only became possible after pasteurisation, refrigeration and the rail network were developed (Nimmo, 2010), which, at the same time, took the production of dairy products away from women who had previously used the sale of milk and cheese for 'pin money' (Pinchbeck, 1981). Dairy farming in Cheshire is woven into the idea of an unchanging English countryside of green fields, hedgerows and cows, despite this form of the industry being less than 150 years old. It is also a part of the national foodscape of producing milk, cheese and speciality ice cream. The closure and changing use of farms has an impact beyond individual farming families and will ultimately create a different English landscape with fewer green fields (Lowenthal, 1991;

Monbiot, 2015). The farmland is clearly a gift passed from grandfather down through the generations but that may be lost to future generations through wider changes in society, just as the industries of coal and salt mining and the making of besoms have ended.

These different depictions of English landscapes have shown how Englishness is built upon a variety of scapes which all connect to the creation, deliberate or otherwise (usually otherwise) of specific landscapes through use and work. Land- and taskscapes are defined by time and the (mainly white) people who have inhabited them and what they did there. This may include doing work that is place-specific, such as dairy farming (and making specifically *Cheshire* cheese or ice-cream) or coal or salt mining. The activity that takes place within the landscape is important in defining the identities of the people who live, work and belong in these places. Inalienable traces of previous generations continue to inhere in the landscape and remember who 'we', that is, those who have inherited this place, are. Each of these histories as it is laid out in leaflets, websites and on signage boards, is positioned as local and English and yet, as Garner (2012) points out, Englishness must be created in relation to an Other. The Other here is implied rather than explicit: those who don't merit a place in the story as it is told are written out or forgotten. And the story as it is told is partial, white, male and informed by the perspective of the powerful: those who own the land and ran the industries (Tyler, 2012). Other stories, of those who prefer mining shafts to bitterns for example; or of salt being replaced in a ship's hold by African slaves, are only glimpsed at and yet are part of the 'particular individual, social and political circumstances' (Tilley, 2006: 7) through which these taskscapes are continually being (re)made. Forgetting, in Renan's (1990) view, may help to forge a nation, but accepting the gift or legacy of a place, that is a taskscape full of inalienable traces embodying the past experiences in this place, can facilitate 'some kind of ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships' (Jones, 2010: 189). All those who inhabit a place in the present and future can share in such a gift equally.

Conclusion

This article has examined Englishness by looking at some of the 'incommensurate qualities' (Stewart, 2007: 30) that go to make up how we understand places. Based on the premise that landscape and the story of the landscape, its history, are key elements of a national identity, the article has explored the shaping of an imagined community of England through three mundane places as well as broader cultural tropes around landscape.

Places are neither self-constituting nor closed structures but are elements of an assemblage of people, place and practices (Cloke & Jones, 2001: 652; Ingold, 2000: 197). Examining 'a place' through its history, and the history of the people who help to constitute the place opens up an opportunity to tease out a particular historical trajectory and question why it happened like this and what kind of place and people are the result (Gray, 1999: 454 - 6). The flashes in Wigan were created through industrial activity, as the Lancashire Wildlife Trust acknowledges; but in talking of 'erasing industrial scars', a crucial era of England's, and particularly Wigan's, history is set aside. The landscape is formed from the industries that previously inhabited the sites – both above and below ground – as are the people. To acknowledge these traces of the past in the present is to present an authentic landscape (Jones, 2010), whereas to hark back to an imagined 'natural' prior state is to buy into a potentially destructive form of nostalgia which denies an element of the past use of the land

and the people who worked there (Kingsnorth, 2008; Trimm, 2012). The full story of the global trade, an essential aspect of the development of the coal and salt mining industries, is missing, however, once again ‘white washing’ the English landscape (Tyler, 2012). In the final example of the Sandstone Trail in Cheshire, a particular version of the past is presented as the authentic one, in this case the Iron Age landscape. At this site rather than ‘nature’ being allowed to ‘heal the scars’ of former human intervention on the hill, ‘nature’ is again being ‘managed’ to create an ‘authentic’ landscape from a particular time in the past (Matless, 2001: 20; Monbiot, 2015). The description of Cheshire as dairy farming country buys into a nostalgic and timeless rural landscape whereas in reality agriculture and rural life have undergone a revolution in the second half of the twentieth century.

By highlighting the connections between people, place and time I have shown how particular essentialising and formulaic understandings of an everyday national identity are materialised in the discourses surrounding these small English landscapes. Drawing on Anderson’s (2006) *Imagined Communities* and Renan’s observation that forgetting plays just as important a part in national identity as remembering, a nostalgic form of English identity is created through morally and culturally authoritative representations of landscape and place. I have demonstrated how this national nostalgia extends to little known places such as the ones described here. England’s industrial past is ‘forgotten’ or ‘written out’ of the picture and ‘nature’ brought to the fore often removing local people from the story. The imagined community of England is thus firmly situated in an ahistoric, bucolic past/present. A combination of nostalgia for an ‘unscarred’, pre-industrial past and the supposed authenticity of the current ‘natural’ landscapes, despite the close management of each in the examples here, serves to support the moral authority of a particularly essentialised natural and timeless kind of white, male Englishness (Daniels, 1993). The industrial and colonial past does not need to be forgotten or erased in order to celebrate English landscapes. ‘Forgetting’ the industrial history of these places plays into an essentialising trope of an unchanging English landscape, which potentially helps to produce a unified national identity (Renan, 1990) but one which excludes those whose identities are based on the forgotten histories: women, ethnic minorities and the working class. This paper has shown how the concept of place as a gift which is passed on and always held in trust for the next generation can both acknowledge past histories, through inalienable traces in the landscape, and include all those in the present who are a part of any of the current taskscapes of England.

Notes

ⁱ Here national identity is used to refer to English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish identities, whilst acknowledging that these are not, in fact, ‘nations’ in their own right but are parts of the nation of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the United Kingdom).

ⁱⁱ What I refer to as ‘natural’ here is not devoid of human influence but is always part of a manmade environment

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